

**Mental Health**  
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**BLAMING THE INDIVIDUAL IS THE EASIEST COURSE**

**Modern Science, However, is Finding That the Community Must Assume Larger Share of Blame**

A correspondent writes about her brother. He was bright at school, she says, but quit at 13 when he was in the 8th grade. During the next few years he worked at a variety of occupations, sticking to none very long. His chief characteristic was a dislike for mixing with others. If there were visitors he would hide. Then he became more peculiar still. He would go for long periods without speaking to anyone; he shaved off all his hair; would light paper and throw it about the house; drank peroxide, hair oil, etc. Finally he was taken to a mental hospital. She seems puzzled by the fact that, at times, he could talk quite sensibly; and wonders if he were not himself largely responsible for his own condition—if he is not more to be blamed than pitied.

To determine the exact cause of human behavior is extremely difficult, and even the most apparently simple case requires a thorough study of all factors involved. Nevertheless, in this case, it is probably safe to say that the boy himself was least to blame. In the first place there is heredity. His physical and mental equipment were thrust on him, so to speak. His nature was the result of a complicated set of factors stretching back into the past. As a child he was open to impressions on all sides, and naturally the first were stamped on him by father, mother, sisters or brothers, and others in the community. He attended a school and was subjected to a system of education which was little concerned in him as an individual. Later, while still a child, he drifted into the industrial world to fit in as best he could. And meanwhile he was passing through the most critical period in life—the age of puberty, when sex and its implications overshadow all else.

Most of us run the gauntlet of all these more or less successfully but a great many fail in one way or another. In the past, when one has failed, we have tried to hold him responsible. We have blamed him and overlooked the environmental factors which are much more to blame. Now it is coming to be realized that we must hold the community responsible; and that the community can meet this responsibility only by providing an environment—home school, occupation, and other social relationships—which will produce the least percentage of misfits. This is a big job, but nothing less will do.

(Information on any point not covered here will be given in later issues if you will address your questions to "Mental Health", 111 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario.)



**Health Service**

OF THE  
**Canadian Medical Association**

Edited by  
**GRANT FLEMING, M.D. - ASSOCIATE SECRETARY**

**HAND TO MOUTH**

Of all the diseases which afflict mankind, by far the largest percentage are due to bacteria, or disease germs—our invisible foes.

They are invisible to the naked eye, but are revealed by the microscope. They have been studied, and the habits and characteristics of some of them are well known. They have their individual peculiarities whereby they differ one from the other: Some go singly, others in pairs; some are oval, others are rod-shaped; one likes one kind of food better than others do; and so the list might go on to a great length. While disease germs differ one from the other, they have points of similarity. For instance, they must

get into the body if they cause disease, and most of them find their way in through the mouth. Another point which they have in common is that they are unable to withstand drying and sunshine. As a matter of fact, they die off fairly quickly outside the body. To exist, they need moisture, warmth and darkness.

It is obvious, then, that it is desirable to keep disease germs from passing between our lips into the dark, warm, moist interior of the body where they have every opportunity to cause mischief.

One frequent way for this to happen is when the germs we have picked up on our fingers and hands get into our mouths because of the habit we have of touching our lips, of putting the

fingers into the mouth, or touching food with unwashed hands.

A considerable amount of disease is a hand-to-mouth affair. As we go about our daily routine, our hands are certain to become soiled. We shake hands with a person who has just coughed or sneezed behind his hand, or who has used his handkerchief that is soiled with secretions. We touch numerous articles which have been touched by other people with hands soiled by their body secretions. As our hands are usually warm and moist, these conditions favor the existence of the germs.

It does not matter if germs are on the hands as long as they stay there. The unbroken skin is a barrier to germs. The danger lies in introducing any germs which may be on the hands into the mouth or nose. This danger can be avoided if we make it a point never to put our unwashed hands to our faces, excepting when using a handkerchief, and never to touch food unless we have thoroughly washed our hands.

No matter how clean they look the hands should always be given a thorough washing before meals or before preparing food, and

they should be wiped on the person's own towel only. It is quite as dangerous to use a common towel as it is not to wash at all.

Questions concerning Health, addressed to the Canadian Medical Association, 184 College Street, Toronto, will be answered personally by letter.

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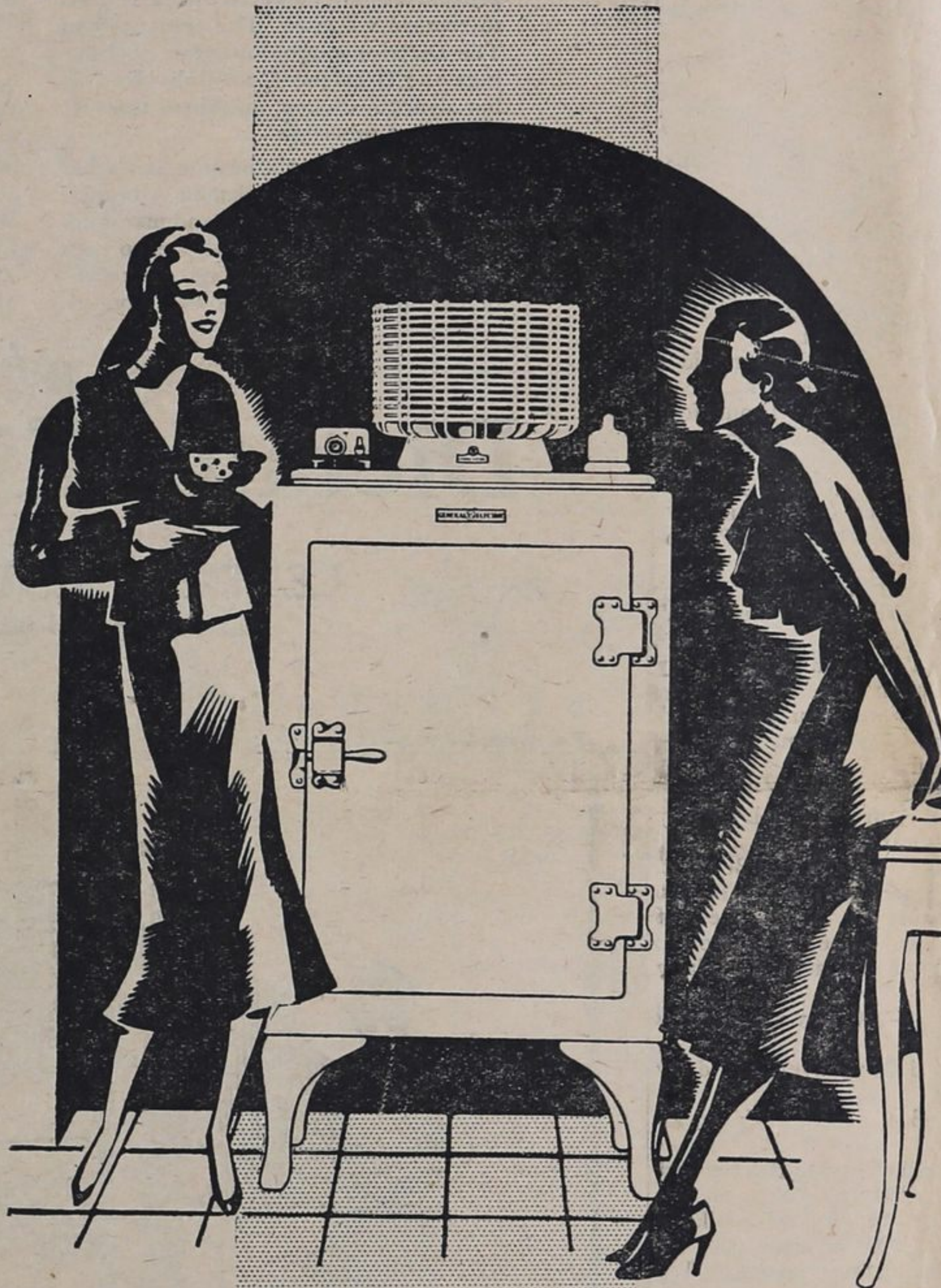
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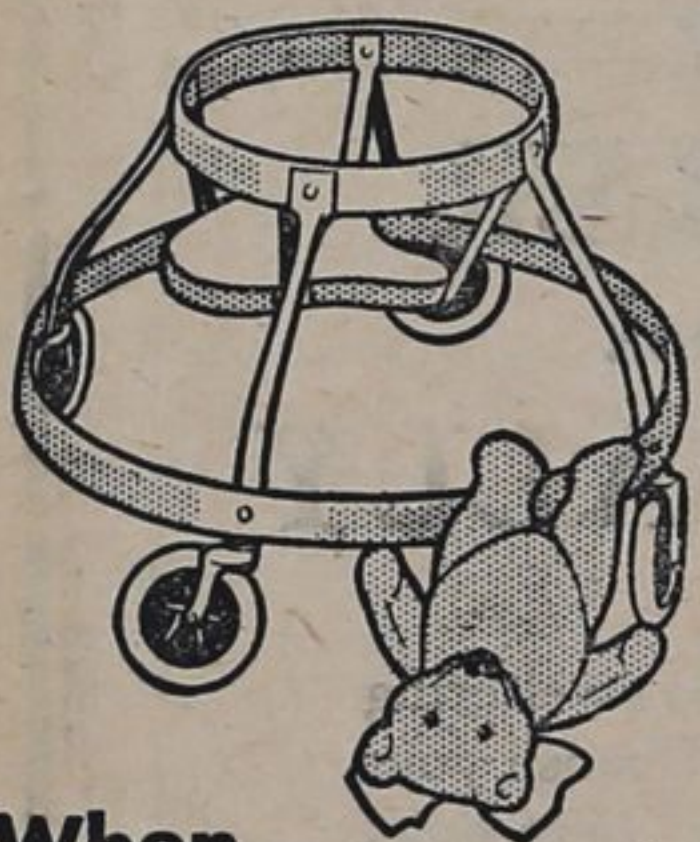
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